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# REPORT FROM THE ROUNDTABLE ON BURMA AND DRUGS

**May 15, 2000**
**Vancouver, British Columbia**

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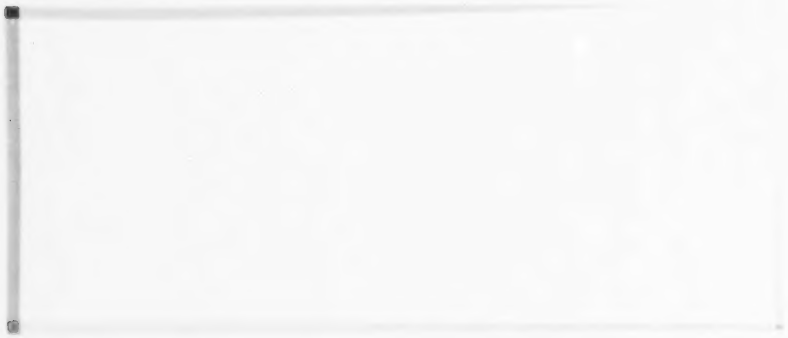

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*A roundtable organized by the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (Southeast Asia Division and the International Crime Division) and Simon Fraser University was held in Vancouver, BC on May 15, 2000, to discuss Burma and the Drug Trade. The Honorable Raymond Chan, Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific, presented opening remarks to a gathering of international and Canadian experts.*

*Political scientists, law enforcement officers, a social planning expert, federal government officials, Canadian journalists, international journalists living in Bangkok, development and human rights NGOs, lawyers, specialists in human security, representatives of the Burmese government in exile, democratic development activists and those with United Nations experience in Burma met for a one day session at Simon Fraser University. The roundtable is the third in a series of roundtables on Burma.*

*The purpose of the roundtable was to focus on Burma as a source of drugs and the impact of drugs on human security in both Canada and Southeast Asia, the political and economic situation in Burma, regional stability and security in Southeast Asia, the control of drugs and possible roles that Canada might play. The following report is a summary of the key themes discussed at the Burma and Drugs Roundtable.*

**OVERVIEW:**

**"Foreign policy is merely domestic policy with its hat on" Lester Pearson**

Burma, amid growing isolation, rumours of cabinet changes and a weakened economy still resists and questions any reform or change in the country. Aung San Suu Kyi is increasingly isolated by the regime. The military cease fire is holding in the country because the control of drug production and profits are firmly in the hands of the military. Students and civil servants are unsettled and unrest is brewing, yet the regime remains confident they are in firm control.

Regionally, relations are deteriorating with Thailand, Bangladesh, China, India and Laos. The President of China feels very strongly about the drug trade and it's regional implications. The critical issues are drugs, money laundering and refugees – issues which could have long term

implications on ASEAN. ASEAN, however, is unlikely to take action on Burma. It lacks leadership and it is unclear what ASEAN could, should or is able to do to address the drug issue in the region.

Acquiring information about Burma and specifically the drug trade is difficult . What information is gained is often fragmented and inconclusive. Law enforcement officers have problems getting sophisticated information about northern Burma and the drug flows and patterns. The drug trade as a political, social and health problem impacts on all of Canada. Some feel different and more integrated approaches need to be explored – and that Canada needs to re-think whether it has done enough.

**WHY IS CANADA INTERESTED?**

The problem of illicit drugs has been raised by the Canadian Government in Asia –Pacific fora since 1997. In the context of human security, which addresses threats to the safety and security of people, illicit drugs is a human security issue for Canadians as well as other countries. The production and trafficking of drugs and the destructive effects on the health of users, corruption of governance structures and the impact on political and economic life are complex and troubling.

Burma is currently the source of most of the illegal heroin entering Canada. Vancouver, as the key transit point, has become a regional drug market with a significant drug problem – a municipality dealing with a global problem without the resources to pursue a balanced approach. As a result social and health problems associated with the drug trade have been neglected in Vancouver and area. The lack of deterence within the province means drugs are not confined to traditional locations, the spread if HIV is higher and drug overdoses have risen.

Canada's approach has attempted to balance health and social issues with law enforcement by working to reduce the supply of drugs and reduce the demand for drugs. However, there are now increased pressures for Canada to play a stronger role in controlling the drug supply– drugs are more visable on the streets, easier to obtain, cheaper to purchase, more accessible to younger people and distributed from the West Coast of Canada and across the country. Some feel it is time for different approaches.

**HARD LINE OR FUNCTIONAL COOPERATION? WHAT SHOULD CANADA DO?**

Views on how to deal with Burma range from no contact and complete isolation (also favoured by Aung San Suu Kyi) to functional cooperation on human security issues such as drugs.

The Friends of Burma, long advocates for democratic development and respect for human rights, favour continuing to promote democracy and non engagement with a regime widely accused of torture, brutal repression of the political opposition and deep involvement in the drug trade. The

RCMP stationed in Bangkok and Vancouver police officers are restricted in their drug trafficking investigations and access to already fragmented information about the source and movement of drugs from Burma.

The United Nations approach is a strong commitment to working and assisting at the village level in areas of basic human needs like health. The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (government-in-exile) indicated they would want contact and cooperative partnerships with the current regime in a transition to a new government.

Canada has repeatedly called on the Burmese regime to enter into political discussions with the democracy movement in the country, called on Canadian firms not to trade or invest in Burma and has called on the country to reduce the production and trafficking of illegal drugs. The question for Canada is: Has the hard line approach been effective? If so, in what way has there been some progress? If not, what are other approaches to consider?

## REGIONAL RELATIONS - STABILITY AND SECURITY – WHAT IS CANADA'S ROLE?

Is ASEAN paralyzed or could it take some action in dealing with the drug trade? Is ASEAN serious about the question of drugs in the region? This is still unclear although there have been some more open discussions among members. Canada has little leverage with the region but it could act as a facilitator and encourage ASEAN to take some action on regional alternatives that might be more acceptable.

The India-China- and Burma rivalry is very complex to sort out. India and others, however, do listen to what Canada says. Canada could work with Thailand on lowering demand. Thailand seems more ready to break the mold and admit they need to do something about drugs. Although China is more concerned about Afghanistan as a source of drugs, China (and the President) could put pressure on others to address the Burma supply. The connection between intravenous heroin use and HIV is a major regional security and health issue especially among younger Asian population. Japan, Taiwan and South Korea are also players to watch in the future.

It was suggested that lessons learned about the drug trade in Latin America could be used in Southeast Asia- perhaps there are shared common problems and some elements of a common approach could be used in the region.

## WHERE DOES CANADA GO FROM HERE?

Should Canada continue a hard line, a harder line or begin to think through other options of how to deal with the source of drugs while not supporting the regime? The Australians, for example have stationed a police member in Rangoon to try to get more information about drugs,

particularly in northern Burma. Some felt that information is very hard to get where ever you are, that it is hard to know who to trust and whether information is credible. It is questionable whether much can be learned while in Rangoon. People don't talk to foreigners and if they do they are arrested immediately. Others felt that drug information needs to be much more comprehensive and intelligence shared with other national interests. The police believe they can not do this from Bangkok alone.

Canada should continue to support democratic and civil society development and humanitarian work (including drug prevention) at the Burmese borders. The UN approach has been to work with Burmese people outside of Burma. When transition to a new government occurs this means there will be some elements for a strengthened infrastructure and leadership with a history of democracy even though the existing systems, including the military, will be still in place. Burma is not open, there is no transparency, no freedom of the press – it is easy to hide what is going on in the country. In any transition, democratization will help ease the drug trade but will not solve it.

Canada could work with partners and institutions in the region by providing training for regional partners such as Thailand to curb the demand for drugs. Although it was generally felt ASEAN has been ineffective, some felt drugs have become such a growing issue that ASEAN should be doing something about drugs. Canada could raise regional security issues with ASEAN members and address the fragmentation of information with Southeast Asia. More openness, access to and sharing of information could help break the wall of silence on drugs.

Canada is a small player in the drug issue but could push for greater international coherence on supply and demand reduction. Addressing the drug problem is similar to small arms – a complex combination of supply and demand, health, legal and human security issues. Canada's domestic policies should be in tandem with it's foreign policy. More financial support is needed by Canadian communities, such as Vancouver, which are dealing with an international problem with only local resources.

**CONCLUSION:**

For some, the promotion of democracy is the only answer to Burma's many problems – problems which include human rights abuses, displaced people along the borders, political repression, drug lords and a military which controls an international drug trade. Others strongly feel that the drug issue must be dealt with at the source while respecting the value of isolating and not assisting a brutal and repressive regime.

It is clear that the Burmese ( as stated by government-in-exile representatives) want to solve their own problems. Foreigners may provide analysis and push from the outside but the Burmese will take their country through a transition to a different government. Power-sharing, peace through

negotiation and working with a structure that is already in place are key challenges. The drug trade will continue to be a major issue for Burma and beyond its borders.

The border area work is very worthwhile, as are the Embassy visits to Rangoon (and to Aung San Suu Kyi) and the police investigations from Bangkok. There are more contacts and better influence as a result. Minister Axworthy may be raising the issue of the drug trade with counterparts from China, Bangladesh and India at ASEAN meetings this summer (2000) as these states are now talking about these issues more openly.

International coherence on the supply and demand reduction of drugs needs to be tackled, just as domestic and local coherence requires more financial support. There is pressure for more comprehensive information about Burma and drugs. There are conflicting values for Canadians – promoting democracy in Burma through isolation versus addressing human security of people in South East Asia and in Canada. This will raise a larger policy question of treatment of pariah regimes and the best way to promote democracy: engagement (Cuba) versus isolation (Burma). Although the roundtable did not arrive at recommendations, it did offer ideas and options for further discussion and consideration.

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**Invitation List**

# BURMA AND DRUGS ROUNDTABLE

**May 15, 2000**
**9:00am to 5:00pm**
**Simon Fraser University**
**Harbour Centre Campus, 515 West Hasting Street**
**Room 1600**

Honourable Raymond Chan
Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific)

Bernard Giroux
Ambassador
Canadian Embassy in Bangkok

Bob Anderson
Simon Fraser University

Steve Lee
Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development

Dawn Mclean
Rapporteur

Ingrid Hall
DFAIT - PSD

Bob Paquin
DFAIT - PSE

Christine Crowther
CBC Journalist - Toronto

Bertil Lintner
Journalist - Bangkok

Luc Vidal
RCMP LO/Bangkok

Jim Myint Swe
NCGUB

Eric Snider
Vancouver Burma Roundtable, Editor of Burma Courier Newsletter

Dr. Alice Khin Saw Win
Medical doctor, former personal physician of Aung San Suu Kyi
Edmonton, Alberta

Yvon Dandurand
International Centre for Criminal Law and Justice Reform

Vivienne Chin
International Centre for Criminal Law and Justice Reform

Peter Gillespie
Inter-Pares, Ottawa

Richard Dickins
Former UNDCP Rep in Burma

Win Kyaw
Lawyer, Edmonton

Gerry Ferguson
University of Victoria

Coreinne Baumgarten
Canadian Friends of Burma, Ottawa

Penny Sanger
Canadian Friends of Burma, Ottawa



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Senior Advisor, Drug Enforcement Branch, RCMP,
Vancouver

Mika Levesque
ICHRRD - Montreal
David Steinberg
Georgetown University

Phil Pinnington
DFAIT - AGC

Lee Lamothe
Nanthanson Centre on Transnational Crime -
Journalist - Toronto

Paul Copeland
Lawyer, Toronto

Siba Kumar Das
Former coordinator of the Un program in Rangoon
New, York

Yannick Lamonde
Executive Assistant to the Director - CCFPD

Chantale Walker
Human Rights and Internet

Patrick Brown
CBC Journalist - Bangkok

Naseem Nuraney
Office of the Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific

Brian Job
University of British Columbia

Carolyn LaBrash
CIDA

Ron Robinson
Asia Pacific Foundation

Donald MacPherson
Social Planner, Community Services Group,
Vancouver

Eugene Chao Jarng Yawngwhe
Department of Political Science at UBC

Win Myint Than
BC Multicultural Health Services Society, Vancouver